

Fr. O'Connor's Homily on 1 June 2025
Feast of the Ascension of the Lord-C

Acts of the Apostles 1: 1-11
Ephesians 1: 17-23 or Hebrews 9: 24-28; 10: 19-23
Luke 24: 46-53

Sometimes we can wonder, "Can I really make a difference in the world? After all, I am only one person."

A relay race helps us to see how important everyone's efforts are. The baton is passed from one person to another. What is essential is that each person takes hold of that baton and does his or her very best. The victory of the team is a victory shared by all the participants.

That is a bit like today's Feast of the Ascension. Jesus gives His last instructions to His disciples. He tells them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth" [Acts 1: 8]. Then He ascends into heaven and is seated at His Father's right hand.

As Jesus passed the baton on to them, He passes the baton of opportunity on to us. Our participation does make a difference, for we are members of Jesus' team: His family, the Church. And we already share in His victory.

Who are the witnesses, the messengers of Jesus Christ that you know? I have a number of names on my list. Today I would like to tell you about three of them.

The first is a lady named Carm Vignone, whom God called home in September 2004. In Carm's younger days she had planned to get married, but then her widowed sister died and left several young children behind. So Carm stepped in, as the children's single aunt, and she became a mother to them.

Carm never did marry. But she wouldn't have changed a thing. She was loved by those children not only as Aunt Carm, but also as their mother. She took hold of the baton of opportunity when the Lord passed it on to her, and she carried it well. She was a faithful messenger of Jesus Christ.

The second person is a Bahamian priest-friend of mine in the Archdiocese of Nassau, Msgr. Preston Moss. People who knew him have

told me that they believe, when he was a younger priest, he had been asked by the Holy Father to be their bishop. But in his humility he turned down that invitation because he believed that he could serve Jesus Christ more effectively as a parish priest than he could as a diocesan administrator. And Msgr. Moss did this faithfully every day until the Lord called him home on 11 March 2019 at the age of 79, having served nearly 54 years as a diocesan priest. He was a faithful messenger of Jesus Christ.

The third person is someone that we all know, Mother Angelica, the foundress of the Eternal Word Television Network [EWTN]. God called her home on 27 March 2016 at the age of 92.

Some years ago, Mother Angelica gave a Lenten lecture at Saint John's Cathedral where I was living, and I was her chauffeur for the day. Now I can tell you this about Mother Angelica: what you saw on the television screen was what you got in real life. She was the same person.

Mother Angelica had been invited to have lunch with us at the cathedral rectory. Bishop Issenmann, who was the retired bishop of Cleveland, was there at the table.

Bishop Issenmann did not mince words. He said to Mother Angelica: "Mother, you belong in your Poor Clare monastery, not in a television studio. Right now you should be in the chapel of your convent praying for us."

Mother Angelica did not mince words either. She replied, looking him square in the eyes: "Bishop Issenmann, if you bishops in the United States were doing what you should to be doing, carrying the message of Jesus Christ to the world on the airwaves, I wouldn't have to. And then I could be praying right now in our chapel before the Blessed Sacrament for the likes of you!"

She took hold of the baton of opportunity when it was passed to her, and she carried it well. She was a faithful messenger of Jesus Christ – and a feisty one at that!

"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth."

We are presented with this opportunity every time we celebrate Sunday Mass. You will notice that at the very beginning of Mass the reader [the lector] carries that big red Book of the Gospels up the aisle and places it reverently on the altar. During the singing of the Alleluias, the priest [namely me] picks up the Gospel Book, carries it to the ambo [the pulpit] and proclaims the Gospel for everyone to hear.

Notice, though, that the Book of the Gospels is carried in at the beginning of Mass, but it is not carried out at the end of Mass. Why not?

Because at the very end of Mass, the last words spoken are a command, such as: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.” And we answer with energy: “Thanks be to God.” Having been nourished by His Word in the Scriptures and by His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, we are sent to carry Jesus Christ and His message to the world.

The message of the Ascension is a direct one: “You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” [Acts 1: 8].

Jesus invites us to take from His hand the baton that He received from His Heavenly Father, and to continue His work here on earth.

Jesus counted on Peter, James and John, and they didn’t let Him down. Jesus counted on the people who heard them, and they didn’t let Him down. And now Jesus counts on us to take the baton of opportunity that He hands on to us, and to be His witnesses to the world, right where we are.

“You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth.”

So “go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”